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ABSTRACT

This document discusses the roles of secondary schools, two-year colleges, and the upper level university in the University of Wisconsin System. Because of close ties with the host communities, Wisconsin's two-year institutions are uniquely situated to function as community resources. The paper discusses the advantages of a collaborative relationship between secondary school history faculties and the history departments at the two-year schools. Significant numbers of students are deficient in the essential skills of critical thinking and writing. In an attempt to solve this problem, university historians and secondary school history teachers in Marathon County, Wisconsin, have established a history teaching alliance. As a result of close contact, university professors have been able to encourage a stronger discipline orientation in secondary education and assist pre-collegiate teachers in maintaining their command of the literature, a primary concern. They have been able to promote the concept that history and history instruction must involve critical thinking more than the simple accumulation of a set of disconnected facts. Interaction with high school teachers has helped strengthen the content, course materials, and standards introduced in the feeder institutions, while it has improved the understanding of the techniques employed by pre-collegiate teachers in the preparation of students for the university. The role of the history instructors at the two-year institutions also must be to prepare students to go on to advanced level history studies. Professors at four-year campuses need to recognize the connective relationship between general education and the major. (DK)

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The Ties that Bind: Linkages Among Secondary Schools, Two-Year Colleges and Baccalaureate Institutions

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"The Ties that Bind: Linkages Among
Secondary Schools, Two-Year Colleges and
Baccalaureate Institutions"

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Unlike most of the presenters on this panel, I teach at a two-year transfer institution that is a fully-integrated unit in the University of Wisconsin System. Most of the thirteen two-year centers in this system are located in the outlying areas of the state, which means our student bodies are often homogeneous in composition, though in part non-traditional. As an open access institution, the university center must often serve the needs of students whose basic skills are either poorly-developed or rusty after years outside the academic life. Simultaneously, we must also challenge some of the brightest students produced by the secondary schools of outstate Wisconsin. Because of our close ties with our host communities, Wisconsin's two-year institutions are uniquely situated to function as community resources in every sense of the word.

As historians providing entry level instruction in introductory courses, we have become aware of the reality that significant numbers of students are deficient in the essential skills of critical thinking and writing. At UWC-Marathon, the History Department has concluded that its concerns relating to the preparation of high school graduates can best be dealt with by establishing a collaborative relationship with the secondary school history faculties whose students enter the university's classroom on a regular basis.

For the past ten years, a fruitful interaction, at first informal and later more structured,

has existed between university historians and secondary school teachers in Marathon County, Wisconsin. Once AHA, OAH, and NCSS joined to create the History Teaching Alliance, we moved towards engagement in a formal professional development program by establishing the Marathon County History Teaching Alliance, which is now in its eighth year of operation.[1]

Through annual summer institutes and a regular academic year seminar, the UW Center history faculty and their secondary school colleagues engage in an ongoing and intensive examination of the latest scholarship in our fields. For example, this academic year we have been exploring the Turner thesis and the impact of the "new western history" on our understanding and teaching of frontier history (a list of topics examined by the Alliance collaborative has been distributed today). Over the years, it has also been possible to explore such important questions as the nature and definition of survey courses, as well as the preparation of students for college level history.

As a result of this close contact and mutual intellectual renewal, we have been able to encourage a stronger disciplinary orientation in secondary education and assist pre-collegiate teachers in maintaining their command of the literature (which they have identified as a primary concern). Equally important has been the opportunity to promote the concept that history and history instruction must involve critical thinking more than the simple accumulation of a set of disconnected facts. Anecdotal evidence and classroom experience persuade us that incoming students therefore enter the university with a better understanding of both the content and academic standards appropriate to university education.

In short, interaction with high school teachers has helped strengthen the content, course materials, and standards introduced in our feeder institutions, while it has improved our

understanding of the techniques employed by pre-collegiate teachers in the preparation of students for the university. It follows that UW Center faculty are better equipped to introduce these students to college-level work in history.

As Alliance leader Kermit Hall has noted, "continued collegial communication and mutual respect" will be the "essential test" of collaborative achievement.[2] At the UW Center in Wausau and in the Marathon County schools, the sense of mutual engagement in the teaching and learning of history is strong. We have been able to use the History Teaching Alliance to create a firm bond between teachers at all places on the educational continuum, while linking the community, the two-year campus, and pre-collegiate institutions in a partnership that holds promise for the future.[3]

But the connection established with our colleagues in the secondary schools constitutes only one link in the educational chain. As Shirley Wilton has ably demonstrated, professional relationships with colleagues at baccalaureate institutions are absolutely essential to the maintenance of our own intellectual vitality and teaching competence. To her remarks, I wish to add the need for curricular and transfer coordination as another important reason for building this particular bridge. For it is clear that without the cooperation of our colleagues at the comprehensive state universities and research institutions, the primary mission of the two-year colleges will be difficult to fulfill.

As an integral element in the University of Wisconsin System, the UW Centers must prepare students for successful transfer into the baccalaureate programs of fourteen diverse stale institutions, as well as a myriad of private schools. Yet because of our size, our history faculties range from only two to three persons per campus, which complicates the effort to provide

history programming that will ensure full transfer of credits for all students. Despite this limitation, we must find ways to enable transferring students to meet a variety of general education history requirements, including preparation in American and European surveys, Western Civilization, World History, non-Western culture, and ethnic studies. We must therefore be professional generalists capable of providing students with the breadth of curriculum, depth of knowledge, and familiarity with critical thinking and conceptual history that will ease their transition to Level II instruction.

These challenges, which I am sure are familiar to most people in this audience, place a heavy burden on classroom teachers. As providers of introductory courses in history, we in the UW Centers bear a responsibility to all historians in the state, an obligation to send them students who think historically, write well, and possess the content material essential to their success as they move to more advanced levels of historical analysis. To students, meanwhile, we have an obligation to offer a sufficient variety of courses to protect their investment in a two-year course of study as a platform for their pursuit of a degree. The task is formidable indeed.

A first step in response to this task is to reach out to our colleagues at four-year campuses, who in turn should recognize the connective relationship between general education and the major. All historians "need to change the view that general education is just the 'intro-stuff' students do before getting on to what is really important.[4] Introductory and survey instruction is serious business, particularly when one considers the significant percentage of students for whom these courses are the only history courses taken. The introductory course is our opportunity to entice students into a meaningful engagement with the past and the crucial decisions of men and women of other generations. Creative teaching at the freshman-sophomore

level can also lead to expanded enrollments in more advanced history courses.

Once two and four-year history faculties acknowledge the validity, intellectual substance, and importance of Level I instruction, we can more easily cooperate to resolve the problems confronting our students. We need to explore together such issues as:

1. Who has responsibility for general education? Or more to the point, what should the general education requirement in history consist of, and what is its place in a freshman-sophomore program?
2. What is the relationship between general education requirements and the major?
3. Should there be any effort to establish guidelines for the content of introductory history courses? Or are such efforts to be avoided?
4. What emphasis should be placed on breadth as opposed to depth? What is the place of inquiry method and the development of critical thinking skills?
5. What is the place of writing and communications skills in history instructions?
6. How can pre-professional and pre-major requirements be satisfied in the two-year institution so that the needs of students will best be met?[5]

As Shirley Wilton has shown, historians at two-year institutions must insist upon a strong professional relationship with their colleagues at all levels and are prepared to function as full partners in an intellectual dialogue. As a practical matter, we must also be advocates for students, as we seek to prepare them for what lies ahead. Few surveys are taught as they were a generation ago, and it is vital that history instruction at the two-year campus contribute to student success at baccalaureate institutions. And curricular coordination must be achieved to avoid unnecessary problems for students. For example, at least two four-year comprehensive

universities in the UW System have moved towards a world history requirement, while the curriculum of the two-year centers has yet to respond to this shift. How will we react to changes in the way our discipline is conceived and taught?

One recent study of the articulation problem has concluded that two factors are significant influences on the success of articulation agreements: the geographic proximity of the affected institutions and the success of community college articulation officers in establishing a positive relationship with the receiving institution's transfer officer.[8] To these I would add an emphatic third: the strength of historian to historian (or teacher to teacher) relationships. Knowledge of our counterparts' work as scholars and teachers can be a powerful factor in easing transfer for our students and assisting faculty at baccalaureate institutions in their development of course equivalencies in history.

One possible approach emerges in James C. Palmer's and Marilyn B. Pugh's detailed study of the community college contribution to baccalaureate instruction in Virginia. Recognizing that a growing percentage of undergraduate instruction occurs in Virginia's two-year colleges, Palmer and Pugh recommend the strengthening of links between the two and four year institution. They propose "joint work involving university and community college faculty in the development of arts and sciences courses (or general education curriculum) leading students to commonly defined outcomes." While ease of transfer would be an important goal, an even more important objective involves "shared expectations"[6] at all levels of instruction.

A second avenue to access, currently being employed within the University of Wisconsin System, involves more aggressive transfer and articulation policies. As has been true in many states, the University has attempted to guarantee that the Associate Degree will meet general

education requirements at receiving institutions.[7] While this represents a positive step, it is widely recognized that pre-professional, pre-major, and other program requirements tend to undercut the transfer policy's intent. Our students are still caught in the cross-fire.

In the final analysis, then, responsibility for serving students devolves upon us as two and four-year history faculty. It is we who must agree on requirements, equivalencies, course content, and expectations. In this light, contacts at all levels become essential: department to department, chair to chair, historian to historian, person to person. And our professional associations are duty-bound to strengthen these ties.

Whether upward to baccalaureate institutions or downward to precollegiate institutions, linkages among historians and teacher-scholars are crucial to the advance of effective, meaningful, and practical history instruction. Such cooperation can only grow from visible evidence of mutual respect for all practitioners of the historian/teacher's craft. We, as teachers at two-year institutions, are strategically located as the key link in the educational chain. If it is to be a force for positive change, the American Historical Association and its membership must actively assist in bringing us together.

ENDNOTES

[1] The History Teaching Alliance was founded with support from the William and Flara Hewlett, Rockefeller, and Exxon Foundations. More recently, it has enjoyed the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Marathon County History Teaching Alliance was formed with initial funding from the national Alliance, Gannett Foundation, the Wisconsin Humanities Council, and the University of Wisconsin Centers.

[2] Eugene Asher, "Linking Schools and Colleges: The Collaborative Approach to Teaching and Learning," Network News Exchange, Vol. XI (Spring, 1986), p. 10.

[3] For extended treatment of the Marathon County History Teaching Alliance's work, see James J. Lorence, "The History Teaching Alliance: A Partnership in Education," Teaching Forum, Vol. XI (May, 1990), pp. 4-5.

[4] Lee E. Grugel and Lucia Harrison, "Hard Lessons Learned from General Education Reform," Perspectives: General Education Revisited, Vol. XXII (Fall, 1992), p. 73.

[5] Grugel and Harrison, pp. 73-74.

[6] James C. Palmer and Marilyn B. Pugh, "The Community College Contribution to the Education of Bachelor's Degree Candidates," in Probing the Community College Function: Research on Curriculum Degree Completion, and Academic Tasks (Washington: American Council on Education, 1993), p. 55.

[7] Palmer and Pugh note that there may be ways to permit non-Associate Degree students to make better use of their "less-structured" use of the community college curriculum as they work towards baccalaureate degrees. They cite a recent (1991) proposal in Virginia to develop 35-unit modules of liberal arts courses, to be offered throughout the state's

community college system and accepted by four-year institutions, as an illustration of new approaches to the transfer problem. Palmer and Pugh, p. 55.

[8] Arthur M. Cohen and Jan M. Ignash, "The Total Community College Curriculum," in Probing the Community College Transfer Function, p. 37.